

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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KENNY C. GUINN, *Governor*

Allen Biaggi, *Director*

Leo Drozdoff, *Administrator*

NEVADA DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION **NEWS RELEASE**

STATE SUPPORTS CONTINUATION OF VOLUNTARY MERCURY AIR EMISSIONS REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR MINING

VMRP partners initiating program review to determine the need for enhancements

CARSON CITY— The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection is responsible for the protection of human health and the environment. Although mercury is a hazardous air pollutant, there is no federal standard for mercury emissions from mining operations. Therefore, the US Environmental Protection Agency and NDEP developed a voluntary partnership program with several metal mining companies in Nevada to reduce mercury emissions. The Voluntary Mercury Air Emissions Reduction Program (VMRP) was launched in 2002 and nearly three years since the programs' inception, mercury emissions have been significantly reduced.

"The Voluntary Mercury Air Emission Reduction Program has a great deal of momentum," NDEP Administrator Leo Drozdoff said. "The VMRP partners believe in the program and recognize a need for further reductions in emissions, greater involvement in the program and an even better program than we have today."

Mercury is naturally occurring in gold ore and it can be released into the air through various gold bearing ore processes. Reporting mercury emissions from mining operations were first required in 1998 and published in the Toxic Release Inventory in 2000. While environmental data do not indicate that mercury emissions from mines pose an imminent and substantial human health threat, NDEP and EPA are concerned that mercury is a toxic and persistent pollutant that can pose a detrimental effect on human health and that significant reductions could be obtained from voluntary efforts. Following a 2001 EPA inspection of Nevada gold mines and a review of existing mercury control equipment in place at Nevada mining operations, EPA, NDEP and Nevada's four largest gold mining operations memorialized discussions about further reductions of mercury air emissions through the VMRP program. In a report published by EPA in December 2004, industry officials reported that mercury emissions have been cut by 40 percent in the state.

The VMRP partners agreed, in the 2002 agreement, to review the program and results following a report that is due in July 2005. In late 2004, the VMRP partners became concerned that reporting was creating confusion and proposed an accelerated review process. Also, concerns from academia for additional participation in the VMRP program furthered the need for discussion of program enhancements.

"Had we followed the traditional approach of establishing standards through the Maximum Available Control Technology regulatory process we would likely not have seen the benefit of reduced emissions that we see today," Michael Elges, NDEP Chief, Bureau of Air Pollution Control, said. "The voluntary partnership program encourages flexibility in technology innovation and greater reductions per transaction cost."

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Innovations in mercury controls include a sulfur impregnated carbon filter technology that didn't exist in 2002 but is used in Nevada mine operations today.

NDEP Chief, Bureau of Air Quality Planning Colleen Cripps added, "Under the VMRP program we would continue to enhance technology instead of forcing a fixed technology for every mine and ore body. At this point we're ready to identify potential gaps and look to develop further enhancements to the program."

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